

Chapter I

Introduction

Aspire to decency; practice civility.

—Ted Koppel, June 14, 1998,
commencement address at Stanford

Question Outline

- I. Why should you develop public speaking skills?
- II. What are the seven components of the public speaking process?
- III. What is communication apprehension?
- IV. How can you overcome fear of public speaking?
- V. What are six keys to confidence?
- VI. What is the incremental method?

*M*arcus Washington, a varsity football player, had seen it all, and he was not afraid of much of anything. Now he found himself required to take a public speaking course. His advisor said he had to take the course because it was required of all education majors. Marcus had faced guys almost twice his size in football, and he had been threatened more than once on the street, but—he thought to himself—he would rather do that all over again than give a speech in front of class.



Why Study Public Speaking?

As you sit in your first class in public speaking, you might wonder why you should bother to learn how to speak in public. After all, public speaking is frightening to many people and, generally, we try to avoid doing things that frighten us. You are not alone. To move you gently into communication studies, this chapter begins with the personal and professional benefits of developing your public speaking skills. You will learn some terms and concepts that will help you understand communication and be given an explanation of how public communication works. Finally, you will learn about the fear of public speaking and how to overcome that fear. You should begin by understanding why you should advance your skills in public speaking.

Two reasons emerge as most important for learning effective public speaking skills. The first is the feeling of satisfaction you will achieve when you become an effective public speaker. The second is the success that is possible when you are the manager, supervisor, or team leader who can inspire and motivate through communication. We believe that people should be able to say what they believe in meetings, in our judicial system, and in our form of government. We know that you may appreciate your public speaking course more after you complete the course: Alumni surveys consistently show that graduates particularly value their public speaking courses (McPherson 1998; Morreale, Osborn, and Pearson 2000).

Personal Advantages

Public speaking holds a number of personal advantages for you. First, you will gain a high degree of self-satisfaction. Second, you will become more confident. Finally, you will become more sensitive. Let us explore each of these personal advantages.

One reason you might want to learn how to speak in public is that this activity can give you a high degree of self-satisfaction. Many of the top public speakers of our time were once timid and afraid of other people. Thousands



We study public speaking for personal and professional gains. (Photo: Roxbury Publishing Co.)

of people in business take the Dale Carnegie course in public speaking or join Toastmasters, an organization that provides practice in public speaking. A teacher in the Carnegie program once said that he decided to teach that course because he had spent so many years being afraid and inadequate in public situations. He found that conquering his fears and developing his skills were so self-satisfying that he ended up devoting his life to teaching other adults how to become effective public speakers.



You may also want to study public speaking because you will gain confidence. Indeed, the title of this book highlights this reason. Although people often come to a public speaking course with some fear, most people leave the course feeling very confident about public speaking opportunities. They feel higher in self-esteem and generally more secure in their speaking abilities than before they took the course.

Finally, public speaking will teach you to be more sensitive to other people. You will learn that public speaking is not a one-directional activity in which a speaker simply provides a message. Effective public speaking occurs only when the audience has been carefully considered in both the preparation and delivery of the speech. In the preparation phase, the speaker considers the audience's interest in the topic, their knowledge about it, and how they might be best informed or persuaded on the topic. In the delivery of the speech, the competent communicator responds to the audience's nonverbal and verbal feedback. Public speaking instruction also reminds us of the cultural diversity in our world and encourages us to consider the different ways that people come to know and experience that world.

Professional Gains

Professionally, you will benefit from your study of public speaking for three reasons. First, public speaking can immediately help you achieve your occupational goals by helping you earn higher grades in college. Second, public speaking skills will help you acquire employment. Third, public speaking will help you advance in your career. Let us explore each of these in more detail.

You know that graduating from college will help you attain higher-paying positions than those you would qualify for if you stopped your education at the high school level. According to the 1999 *World Almanac*, the median income of high school graduates was just under \$25,000 per year; the median income for people with a college degree or more was over \$53,000 (p. 386). You also know that people with higher grades in college are able to compete more favorably for professional occupations than are those with lower grades. Only students with high undergraduate grades are admitted to graduate school, law school, or medical school.

Public speaking can help you earn higher grades in college. A number of skills that are taught in public speaking courses can be applied in other courses. For example, active listening skills that you learn in your public speaking course can be applied in every class you take. Critical listening skills from your public speaking class should be applied to everything you are told. Similarly, you will learn how to organize ideas, a skill that is important in every paper you write. The public speaking class should make you keenly aware of your audience (your boss, your peers, your work team), an awareness that is highly useful in the classroom and in the workplace.

Public speaking skills can help you acquire part-time positions and full-time employment after college. One study in *Communication Education* (Curtis et al. 1989) showed that oral communication was the one factor “most important in helping graduating college students gain employment” (pp. 6–14). The same study listed another communication skill—listening—as second most valuable. Writing skills came in fourth. In public speaking class you



will learn how to analyze an audience and respond to them appropriately, which will help you in job interviews. You will learn how to find information that will be useful as you are attempting to learn about employment opportunities. You will learn more about language, which will help you sound educated and aware of the world around you.

Public speaking will also help you advance in your career. According to Brillhart and Galanes (1998): “Numerous studies have found emergent leaders to be high in verbal participation. . .” (p. 172). People who are good at encouraging, explaining, motivating, and articulating goals tend to move up to more responsible positions. One of the authors once taught public speaking to union leaders, none of whom had finished college, and found that they needed no encouragement to learn, because they had already discovered that knowing something and being able to communicate their ideas to others made them more effective union leaders. In an article in the *Black Collegian* (1997), Bardwell argues that the way you “stand out in the crowd” is by being computer literate and by having strong verbal and written communication skills.

✓ Reality Check 1.1 ✓

Importance of Public Speaking Skills

Winsor, Curtis, and Stephens (1997) investigated the factors that help graduates obtain employment. They learned, from one thousand human resource managers, that public speaking, listening, and enthusiasm were among the most important skills.

The Seven Basic Elements of the Public Speaking Process

Some basic elements are present in all public speaking circumstances. They include the source of the message, or the speaker. The audience members, or receivers, must be present. A message—both verbal and nonverbal—is essential. A channel, or means of communication, must be available. Feedback, which includes verbal and nonverbal responses from the audience, must be demonstrated. Noise—any form of interference with the message—usually has a negative influence on the process. Finally, public speaking occurs in a context, or situation.

Source

The **source** is the person who originates the message. Who the sender is makes a difference in who, if anyone, will listen. Consider a person walking down a street in New York City. Blind people clink their cups for contributions, street corner evangelists shake their Bibles in the air, and vendors push everything from bagels to booties. Would you listen to the messages they are



sending? Some of the talented singers, dancers, and instrumentalists might attract your attention, but few of the many contenders for your eye and ear would succeed. Sources send messages, but no communication occurs until the source and receiver are conjoined by the messages between them. Often we serve concurrently both as source and as receiver.

Similarly, in the lecture hall, you hear some professors who capture your attention and leave you wishing for more. Occasionally you hear others whose ideas put you to sleep. A source cannot exist without a receiver or a speaker without an audience because both are necessary components of effective communication.

Message

Verbal and nonverbal messages are an integral part of the communication process. What else links the source and the receiver? The **message** is sensed by both the source and the receiver: the facial expressions seen, the words heard, the visual aids illustrated, and the ideas or meanings conveyed simultaneously between source and receiver. **Verbal messages** are the words chosen for the speech. **Nonverbal messages** are the movements, gestures, facial expressions, and paralinguistic features that reinforce or contradict the words, such as pitch or tone of voice that can alter the meaning of the words.

Receiver

The **receiver**, listener, or audience is the individual or group that hears, and hopefully listens to, the message sent by the source. All individuals are unique. Receivers are individuals who have inherited certain characteristics and developed others as a result of their families, friends, and education.

The best speakers can “read” an audience; they can—through analysis or intuition—tell what an audience wants, needs, or responds to. This sort of group empathy allows some speakers to be seen as charismatic: They seem to exhibit what the audience feels.

Even a beginning speaker can learn to see the world through the audience’s eyes. Nothing helps more in the classroom than to listen carefully to your classmates’ speeches, because every speech will reveal as much about the speaker as it does about the issue being discussed. Few speakers outside the classroom are able to hear everyone in their audience reveal herself or himself through a speech.

Channel

The **channel** is the means of communication, whether it be coaxial cable, fiber optics, microwave, radio, video, or air. In the public speaking classroom, the channel is the air that carries the sound waves from the mouth of the source to the ear of the receiver. The channel might not seem to make very much difference, but messages have decidedly different impacts depending on whether they are heard as a rumor or observed on network news.

Some public speaking students discover the differences among channels when their teacher videotapes their speeches. Watching oneself electroni-



cally reproduced is not the same as watching a live performance, because channels are themselves part of the message. As Canadian professor Marshall McLuhan (1967) explained, “The medium is the message.”

Feedback

Feedback includes verbal or nonverbal responses by the audience. During a public speech, most of the audience feedback is nonverbal: head nodding, smiling, frowning, giving complete attention, fiddling with a watch. All of this nonverbal feedback is data for the speaker to interpret.

The question-and-answer session is a good example of verbal feedback in which the audience has an opportunity to seek clarification, to verify speaker positions on issues, and to challenge the speaker’s arguments. In any case, feedback, like the thermostat on a furnace or an air conditioner, is the speaker’s monitoring device that continuously tells if the message is working.

Noise

Another component in the communication process is **noise**, the interference with, or obstacles to, communication. Noise is whatever keeps a source from gaining feedback, a receiver from hearing words or seeing facial expressions, and so on. Noise can be internal or external. During a speech, if you are distracted by the presence of another person whom you find attractive, then you are experiencing internal noise that keeps you from receiving the message. If you are unable to hear the speaker because the door is open and you cannot hear over the hall noise, you are experiencing external noise. “Noise” is a broad term used to classify anything that is an obstacle to communication, whether it be the wanderings of the mind or someone’s radio music interfering with the speaker’s words.

Situation

Communication occurs in a context called the **situation**—the time, place, and occasion in which the message sending and receiving occurs. The situation can determine what kind of message is appropriate. Only certain kinds of messages and speakers are acceptable at funerals, senate debates, bar mitzvahs, court hearings, and dedications.

In the classroom, the situation is a room of a certain size, containing a number of people who fill a specified number of seats. The physical setting can mean that you can talk almost conversationally or that you must shout to be heard.

The process of communication is the dynamic interrelationship of source, receiver, message, channel, feedback, noise, and situation. None of these components can be isolated, nor do any of them have any meaning without the others. They are what occurs in public speaking. Speakers and audiences influence each other.

For example, let’s say that you are trying to convince fellow workers that they should unionize. You argue first that the union will result in higher pay. The audience appears unimpressed, so you argue that the union will bring such benefits as better working conditions. They doze. Finally you argue that



the workers will get better medical and dental plans for their families, reducing their out-of-pocket health expenses. This argument gets attentive looks, some questions, and considerable interest. The audience has influenced what the speaker will say.

The speaker conveys a message through words and action, but the audience gives meaning to that message through its own thought processes. An example is the politician who wants to raise the drinking age. Audience members who are younger may hear the message as anti-youth, as having little to do with alcohol consumption. Mothers and fathers might see it as a way to protect their teenage children. Each audience member gives meaning to the message.

Audiences interpret messages; they construct messages of their own from the words they hear, and they carry with them their own rendition of the message and often others' analyses of the same message. A good example of the latter is the concept of "spin." Political campaigns these days are full of "spin doctors"—that is, media experts who try to tell an audience how to interpret a speaker's message. The experts decide for the audience who won a political debate, for example, by telling the audience what they were supposed to derive from the words. The idea of "spin" recognizes the notion that audiences construct their ideas of the message themselves, together with what others tell them the message meant. The process of communication is a transaction between source and receivers that includes mutual influence, the interpretation and construction of meaning, and the development of an individualized message that includes how others respond. What happens when people communicate? A transaction occurs in which speaker and listener simultaneously send, receive, and interpret messages. In public speaking, the temptation is to see the action as predominantly one-way communication: The speaker sends words and actions to the audience. However, in many public speaking situations, the audience influences the speaker through continuous feedback, sometimes with words and actions and sometimes almost subconsciously.

To demonstrate the powerful effect of the audience on the speaker, a teacher challenged his class to influence his behavior. One rule was that the moment he knew they were trying to influence him, the game was over. The class had to figure out what they could do to encourage the behavioral change. After ten weeks the teacher had not caught the class trying to influence him. They had documented, however, that, when the experiment began, the teacher stroked his chin once or twice each class period. They decided that the teacher would feel rewarded if they paid more attention, asked questions, and showed interest. Every time the teacher touched his chin, the class subtly rewarded him with their interest, attention, and questions. By the end of the ten-week course, they had the teacher touching his chin over twenty times each class session—and the teacher did not know it.

The point of this anecdote is that audiences influence speakers. In a political rally, they might do so with the words they yell, the movements and noises they make, or even with the signs they hold. In class, it could be the sight of heads nodding or eyes glazing over. The fact is that speakers influence audiences and audiences influence speakers, and they do so continuously in public speaking situations.



On the Web

You know David Bowie as a musician. If he were to give a speech, what would he say? You can access Bowie's commencement speech at the Berklee College of Music in Boston on May 8, 1999, at <http://www.berklee.edu/commencement/past/default.html>.

Confidence in Public Speaking

Although you have been speaking all of your life, and perhaps as much as one-third of your waking day, you may still have some apprehension about public speaking. Indeed, many people express some anxiety about public speaking. The *Bruskin Report* identified public speaking as Americans' number one fear (What Are Americans Afraid of?, 1973). Although 41 percent of those surveyed identified public speaking as their greatest fear, only 18 percent listed death. The contrast between these two numbers led comedian Jerry Seinfeld to conclude that if people go to a funeral, they would rather be the one in the casket than the one delivering the eulogy.

A later study that focused on social situations identified public speaking as the second most feared activity. The only situation more fearful was a party with strangers (Goleman 1984). In general, we appear to fear the unknown—the unknown person at a party or the unknown situation of presenting a public speech. Although we cannot help you learn about interacting with strangers at parties, our goal in this book is to help you conquer the unknowns of speaking in front of an audience. We will start by informing you about a commonly felt fear—the fear of public speaking.

Fear of Public Speaking

The fear of speaking in public goes by many different names. Once called “stage fright,” a malady most often seen in beginning actors, the phenomenon is now called **communication apprehension**. The term covers many kinds of communication fears in diverse situations: fear of talking on the telephone, fear of face-to-face conversations, fear of talking to authority figures or high-status individuals, fear of speaking to another individual, fear of speaking in a small group, and fear of speaking to an audience.

Why should you learn about communication apprehension? Even the question is controversial. Some teachers of public speaking feel that discussing communication apprehension—even in a textbook—is questionable. Just as medical students think they have many of the diseases they study, students who read about the fear of public speaking may see themselves as more apprehensive than those who do not know about it. However, as more teachers learn about communication apprehension, they support discussion of the problem in textbooks.

You should know about communication apprehension for two reasons. The first is that you need to be able to see the difference between the normal fear most people experience before they give a speech and high communication apprehension, which is a more serious problem. The second reason is that people who are highly apprehensive about communication should

receive special treatment for their problem, or they will spend a lifetime handicapped by their fear.

Let us look first at the scope, symptoms, and effects of high communication apprehension. Then we will examine some solutions to this problem (McCroskey 1996; McCroskey, Heisel, and Richmond 2001; Messman and Jones-Corley 2001).

High communication apprehension. About one out of every five persons is communication apprehensive, that is, 20 percent of all college students.

Fortunately, that statistic means that four out of every five students, or 80 percent, are not apprehensive. Communication apprehensive people may not appear apprehensive unless they are engaging in a particular type of communication. High communication apprehension seems unrelated to general anxiety and intelligence. You may show no overt signs of anxiety in such activities as playing football, studying, eating, watching television, or walking to class. However, **the high communication apprehensive (HCA)** person

has such strong negative feelings about communicating with other people that he or she typically avoids communication, or exhibits considerable fear when communicating. The scope of the communication apprehension problem may not appear large, but millions of people suffer from the fear of communicating.

One symptom of communication apprehension is that the HCA person tries to avoid communication situations. Two researchers conducted a study to find out what would happen if HCA students had a choice of an interpersonal communication course or a public speaking course. They found that HCA students overwhelmingly chose the interpersonal communication course. The researchers suspected that students perceived the public speaking course as much more threatening than the interpersonal communication course (Pearson and Yoder 1979). Similarly, in small group communication courses, HCA students tend to be nonparticipants or to repeatedly register for—and drop—the class. HCA students try to avoid participating in the kind of communication that arouses their fears.

What are some other characteristics of HCA people? They choose residence hall rooms at the ends of halls away from other people or housing away from busy streets and playgrounds. HCA people sit away from others or in places where leadership is not expected (near the corner of the table or far from the end where the leader might sit). When HCA people do find themselves in communication situations, they talk less, show less interest in the topic, take fewer risks, and say less about themselves than their classmates



A speech class can help you overcome normal communication apprehension. (Photo: Roxbury Publishing Co.)



do. HCA people may be difficult to get to know. Even when they do find themselves in situations where communication is unavoidable, they discourage talk with signs of disinterest and silence.

The effects of high communication apprehension can be serious. HCA people are rarely perceived as leaders. They are seen as less extroverted, less sociable, less popular, and less competent than their peers (Feingold 1983). They are not perceived as desirable partners for courtship or marriage. They are viewed as less composed, less attractive socially, and less attractive as work partners. Because they communicate reluctantly and seem so uneasy when they do, others perceive HCA people negatively. Therefore, they tend to do poorly in interviews and tend not to get the same quality of jobs as non-apprehensive people do. However, they are not less intellectual, mentally healthy, or physically attractive (Feingold 1983). The consequences of being HCA seem serious enough to encourage us to look next at solutions.

One way to reduce high communication apprehension is to be aware of the malady and to understand that people with anxiety actually prepare differently, and less effectively, than do people without anxiety. Professor John Daly, of the University of Texas at Austin, and three doctoral students showed that anxious people are overly concerned with self and are negative in their assessments. They choose speech topics with which they are less familiar and have less sensitivity to public speaking situations (Daly et al. 1989). A **self-fulfilling prophecy**—behaving as others predict we will—is thus created. Anxious individuals are fearful, they prepare less effectively, and consequently they perform worse, reinforcing their fear of the public speaking situation. This cycle may be broken by more effective preparation.

A second way to resolve feelings of high apprehension is through relaxation. Two techniques are possible. First, you can practice muscle relaxation, which will assist you with the physical symptoms you may have. When you deliberately tense a muscle and then relax it, you experience physical relaxation. You can become less physically tense by consciously tensing and relaxing the muscles in the various parts of your body. You may wish to work systematically from head to toe or in another reasonable progression. You may want to sit in a comfortable position or lie down as you relax your muscles.

The other side of relaxation is stopping those thoughts that make you nervous. When you begin to have anxiety-producing thoughts, you may wish to consciously calm yourself.

Another remedy for high communication apprehension is professional help. The negative feelings about communication in the HCA person have often been developing since childhood. They do not disappear easily. Many schools and colleges have psychologists and counselors who have had professional training in reducing students' fears about speaking in public. Treatments that include training in the control of anxiety appear to be particularly helpful (Worthington et al. 1984). If you think you are among the small percentage of people who have an unusually high fear of public speaking situations, then you may want to talk to your public speaking teacher about the services available to you.

A final possibility for treating the fear of public speaking is called systematic desensitization. **Systematic desensitization** is the repeated exposure to small doses of whatever makes you apprehensive. A public speaking student might be asked over a number of weeks to think of what is frightening (e.g., going to the front of the room to speak) and then to immediately follow the

frightening thought with thoughts that relax. This process repeated over time tends to diminish a person's anxiety about communicating.

So far, this section on the fear of public speaking has concentrated on the individual with extreme fear. What about the vast majority of persons who have a normal fear of public speaking? What are the signs of normal fear, and what can you do about reducing this normal fear—or even getting it to work for you instead of *against* you?

Normal communication apprehension. Most human beings feel fear when they speak in public. New teachers march into their classes armed with twelve hours' worth of material—just to be sure they will have plenty to say in their one-hour class. Experienced speakers feel anxiety when they face audiences that are new to them. Nearly all of the students in a public speaking class feel anxiety when they think about giving their speeches and when they deliver them.

What are the classic symptoms of communication apprehension for the public speaker? The authors of this book have given hundreds of speeches but still cannot sleep well the night before an important speech—one sign of anxiety or fear. Another common symptom is worry: you can't seem to get the speech out of your mind. You keep thinking about what giving the speech is going to be like, and you keep feeling inadequate for the task. When you actually give the speech, the common symptoms of fear are shaking—usually the hands, knees, and voice; dryness of the mouth—often called cottonmouth; and sweating—usually on the palms of the hands. One wit noted that public speakers suffer so often from dryness of the mouth and wetness of the palms that they should stick their hands in their mouth. For the public speaker, however, fear is no laughing matter. Let us turn from what the normal speaker *feels* to how the normal speaker *behaves* when afraid.

The speaker who is afraid—even with normal fear—tends to avoid eye contact, speak softly, utter vocalized pauses (“Well,” “You know,” “Mmmmm”), speak too slowly or too quickly, not know what to do with hands or feet, stand as far away from the audience as possible, and place as many obstacles as possible between the speaker and the audience (distance, lecterns, notes). The speaker who is overcoming fear looks at the audience; speaks so all can hear easily; avoids vocalized pauses; speaks at a normal rate; moves body, arms, and feet in ways that do not appear awkward; stands at the usual distance from the audience; and uses the lectern to hold notes instead of as a hiding place.

Now that you understand the fear of public speaking and the way a speaker acts when afraid, you need to understand how you can replace anxiety with confidence.

Celebrating Diversity

Martin Luther King, Jr., in one of his many speeches, affirmed, “Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind.” King’s rhetoric of nonviolence would most likely cause him to be a critic of the current hostilities. Take a position on the situation in the Middle East and draft a short position statement, which you can share in class. How did King celebrate diversity in his statement?





Reducing Anxiety

What can you do to reduce the anxiety that you are likely to feel before speaking? What thoughts can you think, what actions can you take, and what precautions can you observe to help you shift attention from yourself to your message and your audience? The following six keys to confidence can help you reduce your fear of public speaking.

Act confident. Actions often change before attitudes do. You may act as if you like others before you really do. You work with people (an action) as you get to know and like them (an attitude). Sometimes you may be more comfortable when you are acting. You dress up for a party and act in a certain way. You decide that you are going to have fun at a social event, and you act that way.

You can use the same strategy when you speak by thinking of public speaking as acting. You can say to yourself, “I am going to act confident when I speak,” and then proceed to act confident even if you are not. It is not much different from acting cool on the street, playing the role of the intellectual in class, or pretending you are a sports hero in a game. You are simply acting as if standing in front of the class does not make you nervous.

Know your subject. Your first speech should be about something you know already. It should not require research. In fact, many communication professors ask you to talk about yourself. Whether you speak about some aspect of yourself or some other topic, you will be a better speaker if you choose a subject that you know something about.

When LaMarr Doston had to give his first speech, he could think of nothing about himself that he wanted to share with the class. He was glad that he did not have to do research for the speech, but he was unhappy that he did not know what to say about himself. After two days of worrying about it, LaMarr was in his office at work when he thought of what he was going to say: “I am LaMarr Doston, the Fast Food King.”

LaMarr had worked for five different fast-food chains over the years. He worked his way from a mop jockey at one place, to counter server at another, to fry cook at a third, to night shift manager at a fourth, and now morning shift manager at the fifth food chain. LaMarr was good at his work, he was promoted frequently, commended often, and recommended highly. He seemed to know every job there was at a fast-food outlet. He was the Fast Food King.

Care about your subject. Amanda Carroll gave an introductory speech about herself, about being adopted and bi-ethnic. Amanda had one African American parent and one European American parent. As a baby, she was put up for adoption in a small Ohio town and raised by white parents. Amanda was very perceptive. She knew that people wondered about her origins because of her appearance. She satisfied the audience’s curiosity and provided an added dimension by discussing the satisfaction of being chosen as a baby by parents who wanted and loved her.

If your teacher wants you to speak on a topic other than yourself, you should make sure that you select one that you know and care about. Do not talk about abortion, gun control, or other politically charged issues unless those are subjects in which you are passionately interested. The more you care about your subject, the more you are going to focus on the message and the audience instead of worrying about yourself.



See your classmates as friends. It would be difficult to think of an audience that is more concerned about your success than your classmates in a beginning public speaking course. Well, maybe your mother or your favorite uncle would care more, but the students in your speech class worry about you so much that if you should falter, they break into a sweat. They care how you do. See them as friends instead of uncaring strangers, and your perceptions will help you feel confident in front of the classroom.

See yourself as successful. If you are an inexperienced speaker, you may need to work at thinking positively about your prospects as a public speaker. You need to think about and then rehearse in your mind how you are going to give your speech. Some people might call this “worrying,” but psychologists call it “mental imaging.” Whatever you call it, you can use it to help you succeed.

One experiment had basketball players think about and then rehearse in their minds how they were going to improve their play. They were compared to players who actually practiced to improve their play. The players who rehearsed in their minds did as well as those who actually practiced. If it can work in basketball, perhaps it can work in public speaking as well. See yourself as successful and you are more likely to be successful.

Practice toward perfection. Everyone thinks that practicing your speech will be beneficial, especially if you do not practice it so often that it becomes a memorized speech. Practicing your speech under conditions that duplicate your classroom can also help.

Make sure that you take every opportunity to stand in front of the class before class begins and as your classmates leave the room. You need to see what the class looks like before you give your speech. Unless you have been a teacher, a business trainer, or have had other opportunities to speak in front of groups, you do not know what an audience looks like from the front of the room. The more you get accustomed to that sight before you give your speech, the better off you will be.

Most universities have classrooms that are empty some hours during the day or evening. Have some of your friends listen to your speech as you practice it in an empty classroom. The experience will be very close to what you will encounter when you actually give your speech. The practice will make you more confident.

Finally, you should consider some suggestions from students in a beginning speech communication class. When asked what they did to reduce anxiety, they mentioned the following ideas:

Move to the front of the room as if you owned it, and act as if the audience respects you and wants to hear your words.

Begin talking only when you feel comfortable. Look at the people in your audience before you start talking with them—just as you would in a conversation.

Focus on the friendly faces in the audience. Watch the people who smile, who look attentive, and who nod positively. Concentrate on the people who make you feel good about yourself and your speech.

Have your introduction, main points, and conclusion clear in your head. Practice them. The examples and supporting materials come easily when the important points are remembered.



Perhaps this information will come as no surprise to you, but one of the very best ways to overcome anxiety and to increase confidence is to take a course in public speaking. Your teacher will guide you, your classmates will support you, and the assignments will advance your knowledge and skill about public speaking. Teachers and classmates can help you discover your strengths and weaknesses. Repeated performances tend to reduce anxiety. Most of all, you will learn to focus your attention away from your anxiety and toward the message and the audience. You will be so busy communicating your message and monitoring the audience responses that your anxieties will be gone.

This book is called *Confidence in Public Speaking* because gaining confidence goes hand in hand with gaining competence in public speaking. At first you have to overcome fear, learn how to organize thoughts, learn how to best communicate those thoughts to an audience, and learn how to evaluate your effectiveness. Ordinarily, one course in public speaking will not be enough to make you a professional, but it is a necessary first step. This course will be your starting place, enough to give you the tools for future growth. The activities outlined in this book, with careful coaching by your teacher and the encouragement of your classmates, can launch you into a lifetime of increasing satisfaction and effectiveness as a public speaker.

You should be careful not to have unrealistic expectations. Not everyone starts from the same place. People of all ages, cultures, nationalities, and experiences today populate colleges. Some students have been active in the work world for years. Some have come to college with half a lifetime or more of experience; others have very little experience and may even be uncertain about their command of the English language.

This book works on building your confidence, so you can spend a lifetime working on your competence and your effectiveness with audiences in public speaking situations. With education and experience, you will learn more so that you can speak with authority on more subjects. During your lifetime, you will occasionally find issues at work, at home, in your neighborhood, and in social and professional organizations that make you want to speak out and influence other people.

Becoming Confident in Incremental Steps

Whatever your age, you have been speaking for many years. Your speaking may have been confined to talking to relatives, friends, classmates, or co-workers. You may not have had much experience talking to 20, 50, or 100 people at once. However, you can learn to speak to larger groups just as you have already learned to talk with those who are close to you.

The method of learning advocated in this book is the **incremental method**, or learning a complex act by learning in simpler, smaller pieces. An increment is a brief exposure to a larger whole. Taking a step is an increment in learning to walk. Learning to start a computer is a step in learning to use software. Learning to read a stock market report is a step in learning how to invest. In public speaking, the incremental method is based on the idea that a public speech is complex and can best be learned in increments, or small steps, that lead to mastery of a larger whole, the delivery of a complete speech in front of an audience.



This book encourages the notion of learning public speaking gradually in small, easy-to-master steps that give you encouragement as you learn. For example, learning to say a few words about yourself to an audience is easier than researching and speaking on a complex issue. Preparing a one-minute speech is easier than delivering a ten-minute speech. The idea of learning a complex activity gradually, in small steps, is the key to incremental learning.

Along with gradual learning, the incremental method depends heavily on cooperative support from your teacher and classmates. Teachers and fellow students who reinforce what you have done well are inviting you to do more of the same. Their constructive comments about what you could improve show support that is necessary for your development as a speaker.

The incremental method of gaining confidence in public speaking, then, is based on two ideas: gradual mastery of simple steps toward a complex goal and continued reinforcement and support as you learn the steps toward effective public communication.

✓ Reality Check 1.2 ✓ Why Study Communication?

According to Professor Rod Hart (1993), “Communication is the ultimate people-making discipline. . . . Those who teach public address and media studies teach that social power can be shifted and public visions exalted if people learn to think well and speak well.” If freedom goes to the articulate, then communication teachers help the voiceless find their voice.

NCA Credo for Communication Ethics

The National Communication Association affirms nine principles of ethical communication. Two of those principles are:

- We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.
- We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision-making fundamental to a civil society.

We will add additional principles in other chapters. For now, explain how these principles may affect your public speaking in this course.

Summary

The goal of this book is to help you become confident in your public speaking. Learning public speaking is important for you because it has personal advantages and allows professional gains. Personally, you may gain self-satisfaction, confidence, and sensitivity. Professionally, you may achieve better academic grades, you may have better chances to acquire employment, and you may have more opportunities to advance your career.

You have already practiced the elements of public speaking, even if you have never delivered a speech. The public speaking process incorporates seven basic elements: the source of a message, the receivers of a message, a message, a channel, feedback, noise, and a situation. Public speaking is a pro-



cess and a transaction. You are at the beginning of a course that will probably have a positive and lasting effect on the rest of your life.

We encourage you to become a more confident public speaker. Most people fear public speaking, but this fear can be overcome. Speakers become increasingly confident as they become more competent in public speaking. Public speaking skills and competence are best learned in incremental steps. The ideas of incremental learning and positive reinforcement are two important aspects of learning confidence. Incremental learning is instruction in small bites that encourage you to feel good about yourself, your message, and your audience. The idea is to move from simple to complex speeches, shorter to longer time limits, and single to multiple ideas—and to do this gradually over the term.

Communication Narrative 1.1 **Fear of Speaking and Speaking Out of Fear**

Betty Homans is a thirty-three-year-old housewife who quit community college after her first year, married a guy she met at work, and bore two sons, now 2 and 4. She and her husband were devoting much of his paycheck to the mortgage on a not-very-fancy, aluminum siding house in a middle-class neighborhood. Mostly her life had been unruffled, but now something was happening that really made her mad: The zoning commission was having a public hearing about the possible sale of public land (actually the nice park right across the street from Betty's home) to a private developer. The developer was going to pay a generous price for the land, and the community government needed the money. But the homeowners were horrified at the prospect of losing their park to a developer who planned to build over fifty townhouses on the property. The new development was practically guaranteed to raise taxes, increase crowding, lower housing values, increase traffic, and invite a couple of hundred strangers into the community.

At the zoning commission hearing Betty was among twenty-five residents who had been selected to address the members of the decision-making group. She was the fifth speaker—after two young attorneys and two business owners. Betty was one of only three women in the lineup and appeared to be the youngest speaker as well. Betty had fire in her gut and passion in her heart. She knew that she had to persuade this group of ten older men to see the situation from the point of view of a young mother with children. At first she was so nervous that her tongue felt like a cotton rag; her hands were sweating; and she felt light headed as if she were going to faint. But the prospect of all those people, all those cars, a crowded school seemed like a threat to her two small sons. So she stood there at the microphone and told that commission how their decision would affect current residents and especially the children in the community. Her nervousness diminished sharply after the first minute or so, when she focused on getting her message across to the zoning commission. Out of fear of losing her happy home, Betty overcame, for the moment, her fear of public speaking.

Discuss the following questions with classmates inside or outside of class. How does a strong purpose diminish nervousness? Can you think of any instances when you were so determined that you spoke out fearlessly? Do you think that a young mother has any chance of persuading an official body like a zoning commission to accept her point of view? What arguments would you use if you were in Betty's situation? What perspectives and arguments would be most likely to work with a group like a zoning commission?



Vocabulary

channel The means by which a message is sent: air, paper, microwaves, wire, radio signals, video, and so on.

communication apprehension Communication anxiety in diverse situations: fear of talking on the telephone, fear of face-to-face conversations, fear of talking to authority figures or high-status individuals, fear of speaking to another individual, fear of speaking in a small group, and fear of speaking to an audience.

feedback Verbal and nonverbal messages from an audience to a speaker, who must interpret those messages.

high communication apprehensive (HCA) A person with strong negative feelings about communicating with others, a person who typically avoids communication, or a person who exhibits considerable fear when communicating.

incremental method Learning a complex act (like public speaking) in simple steps over time.

message Sent by source and receiver, the message includes facial expression, words, visual aids, and meaning exchange.

noise Whatever interferes with the communication process by impeding the transmission or reception of messages.

nonverbal messages The gestures, movements, facial expressions, and nonword sounds (pitch and tone) that communicate meaning.

receiver The one to whom a message is sent.

self-fulfilling prophecy Behaving as others predict we will behave.

situation The context in which communication occurs.

source The originator of the message.

systematic desensitization The repeated exposure to small doses of whatever makes you apprehensive.

verbal messages The words that are chosen for a speech.

Application Exercises

1. Write as many reasons as you can why public speaking could be useful to you now or in the future.
2. Examine the characteristics of public speaking—improved language, organization, preparation, and delivery—and speculate about which of them you believe will cause you the fewest problems.

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